

Non-active Voices in Kurdish and Baxtiari: Filling a Typological Gap

INTRODUCTION. Non-Active Voice (henceforth, NAct) structures refer to a group of remarkably similar structures which prevent external arguments from surfacing syntactically, such as *anticausatives* (e.g., *break*, *open*), and *passives*. NAct structures are classified morphologically into two types in many languages: *analytic* (or periphrastic) NAct voice is expressed through a combination of an auxiliary and a non-finite element (participle, infinitive, or nonverbal element), as in English (1a), while *synthetic* voice is expressed by a designated NAct morpheme, as in Japanese (1b). NAct voices can also surface syncretically across languages (2). That is, two or more underlyingly distinct NAct voices are pronounced identically.

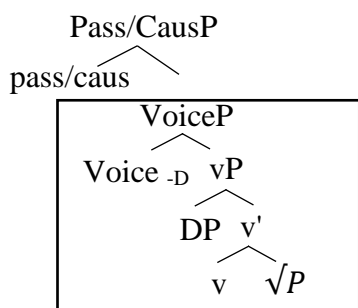
Oikonomou and Alexiadou (2022: 25), henceforward O&A, make a generalization about voice syncretism: “voice syncretism is associated with synthetic morphology”. They argue that in languages with both synthetic and analytic constructions, there can be no ambiguity in the interpretation of analytic constructions and they must have a single designated interpretation (O&A, 2022: 2). Only synthetic morphology can be interpreted ambiguously (as passive, middle, etc). O&A take voiceP as a phasal head and relate un-/ambiguity to the presence and absence of a designated additional head above voiceP, respectively. Then, any head that disambiguates voice (a causative, anticausative, passive head etc.), is phase-external (3). Thus, each phrase must be spelled out separately and has a designated interpretation. In the absence of a higher head, however, vP and voiceP sequences remain in the same phase, transferred to spell out simultaneously, resulting in a synthetic NAct voice with ambiguous interpretation (4).

DATA. This generalization, however, is at odds with two related Iranian languages. Kurdish and Baxtiari (5), with both analytic and synthetic NAct voice systems, demonstrate the exact opposite behavior from O&A’s generalization. In what follows, we will focus on Kurdish but the analysis can be extended to Baxtiari as well. To form a NAct sentence, Kurdish can, analytically, replace the active light verb (LV), *kerden* ‘to do’ with the NAct auxiliary, *bun* ‘to become’ (5b). This structure is ambiguous between an anticausative reading, in which the house is destroyed by itself, and a passive reading, in which an implicit agent is present. This violates O&A’s generalization because Kurdish uses syncretic analytic NAct voice. Kurdish can express NAct voice synthetically (5c), by attaching the NAct affix (-*ra/-ya*) to the root of the active LV, ‘to do’. In this case, the agent is implicit, and the NAct construction has no anticausative flavor. The data thus provide evidence that there is no constraint on combinations of ambiguous readings and forms: they can be analytic and unambiguous (English), analytic and ambiguous (Kurdish/Baxtiari), synthetic and unambiguous (Kurdish/Baxtiari/Hebrew) and synthetic and ambiguous (Russian). In light of these languages falsifying O&A’s generalization, we can conclude that whether a voice is unspecified or not does not reflect its analytic or synthetic nature. Therefore, both un-/ambiguous synthetic and analytic NAct forms should be possible in principle, and whatever mechanism drives the un-/ambiguity differs from what is responsible for analytic/synthetic. We adopt O&A’s claim that the analytic form occurs when the derivation spells out voices separately. However, we argue against the idea that voice heads are phasal. Regardless of the VoiceP’s nature, there is nothing that prevents a language from expressing the Voice head as an ambiguous analytical construction. Concretely, we propose that NAct voices have the same underlying structure: VoiceP > PredP > RootP. It is language-specific properties, however, that determine whether voice, Pred, and Root heads are spelled out as one unit (i.e., synthetic) or separately (i.e., analytic). The only crucial factor for NAct structures is that the NAct head c-commands the Pred head.

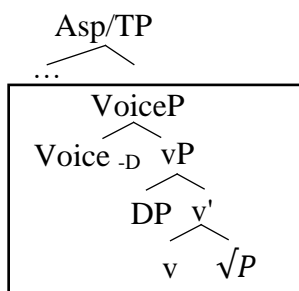
CONCLUSION: By dropping the idea that VoiceP is a phase, there is no longer a prediction that the analytic forms are unambiguous and only synthetic forms can be ambiguous. There is no connection between analytic vs. synthetic morphology and the absence or presence of a particular interpretation anymore. NAct *forms* are governed by morphosyntactic rules which are language-specific, as proven correct by the data presented in this paper.

- (1) a. The door was opened. (English)
 b. hanako=ga sensei=ni sikar-are-ta. (Japanese)
 hanako=nom teacher=dat scold-NAct-Pst
 ‘Hanako was scolded by the teacher.’
- (2) kalitka otkryvalas. (Russian)
 gate open.Impf.Pst.NAct
 ‘The gate was being opened (by e.g., Oleg).’
 ‘The gate was opening.’ (O&A, 2022: 25)

(3) Designated Pass/ Caus Cs



(4) Syncretic voice



- (5) a. ?æli mal-aka-i xæraw kerd. (Kurdish/ active)
 Ali house-Def-acc destroy do.PST.3rd.SG
 ‘Ali destroyed the house.’
- b. mal-ækæ xæraw bu. (Kurdish/analytic/anticausative/passive)
 house-Def destroy become.Pst.3rd.sg
 ‘The house was destroyed (by itself/ or by e.g., Ali).’
- c. mal-ækæ xæraw ker-ra/ya. (Kurdish/synthetic/anticausative)
 house-Def destroy do-Nact.Pst
 ‘The house was destroyed (by e.g., Ali).’
- d. ?æw rext-e vabi. (Baxtiari/analytic/anticausative/passive)
 water pour-Prtc become.Pst.3rd.sg
 ‘The water was poured (by e.g, Ali). / The water poured (by itself).’
- e. ?æw ris-est. (Baxtiari/synthetic/anticausative)
 water pour-NAct.Pst
 ‘The water poured.’

SELECTED REFERENCE: Oikonomou, D. & Alexiadou, A. 2022. Voice Syncretism Crosslinguistically: The View from Minimalism. *Philosophies* 7, 19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/>